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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINS KCRM PTER EAID SNAR GR
SUBJECT: THE HELLENIC POLICE: FEW FRIENDS, BIG CHALLENGES

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel V. Speckhard for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Since the riots that swept across Greece after the death of a 15-year-old youth in an altercation with police, the public spotlight has been on the Hellenic Police (HP) -- both for its role in the shooting but also for its perceived ineffectiveness in protecting property owners and maintaining general law and order. Long distrusted by the Greek populace for its historical role as enforcer for the 1967-74 military junta, the police force is vilified by the political left, neglected by government ministers, and demoralized internally. In addition, the HP is institutionally weak in case management for complex and long-term investigations, suffers high turnover and a politicized assignments system, and is constrained operationally by onerous privacy laws. Despite these challenges, the HP has been remarkably eager and helpful in cooperating with the United States on joint investigations and security. The HP has a critical need for more training, especially in counterterrorism, cybercrime, and explosive ordnance disposal, which would strengthen its capacity to deal with significant threats shared by both the U.S. and Greece. Given the direct USG interest in combating terrorism and criminal networks in Greece, we recommend expanding our cooperative efforts to improve police effectiveness, including making Greece eligible for existing programs such as the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) training and Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) programs. END SUMMARY.

HP History, Politics, and Culture

¶12. (SBU) In the three decades following World War II, Greece's police forces were a bastion of political and cultural conservatism, whether as royalists fighting Communist partisans during the Greek civil war (1946-1949) or quelling political unrest on behalf of the Greek military junta (1967-1974). In 1984, the leftist Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) government carried out a major re-organization, integrating the gendarmerie (responsible for rural and border policing) and the city police, creating the unified national police force that exists today, known within Greece as the Elliniki Astinomia (ELAS). In the 1990s PASOK and New Democracy (ND) governments continued to restructure and modernize the police, adding specialized units such as a violent crimes division and an internal affairs unit.

¶13. (C) Prior to the establishment of Greece's first Socialist government in 1981, the police were traditionally allied with political conservatives and "law and order" constituents, and even today left-leaning political parties tend to criticize the police and issue allegations of police brutality more vociferously. PASOK's reforms, aimed at making the HP more accountable to the government in power, had the added effect of politicizing the police leadership: high-ranking officers are typically reshuffled every two years by the ruling party. Thus, current police leadership is generally affiliated with the ND party. However, rank-and-file officers tend to reflect the broader Greek electorate, with many police with PASOK and ND sympathies. Regardless of politics, many officers resent the reflexive anti-police attitude of the Greek public, which is quick to criticize the HP over any allegation of brutality or corruption. In the aftermath of the December 6 death of 15-year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos by police officers, some police unions organized counter-demonstrations against what they perceived as anti-police bias in the media.

Structure and Demographics of the HP

14. (SBU) The HP falls under the authority of the Minister for the Interior and Public Order, Prokopis Pavlopoulos, and day-to-day operations are overseen by the Chief of Police, Vassilios Tsiatouras, and newly appointed Alternate Minister of Public Order Christos Markoyiannakis. As a result of the 1980s reforms, the HP has a military structure and its officers have military rank. The HP's mandate covers a wide range of law enforcement responsibilities, from counterterrorism and organized crime investigations to VIP protection detail, traffic fines, and border control. Geographically, the HP is divided into sectors for northern and southern Greece. Each prefecture (or periphery) has its own police division, headed by Inspectors General. Specialized units, such as divisions for financial crimes, violent crimes, combating terrorism, and internal affairs are located at the headquarters in Athens. The HP also has units for combating trafficking in persons (TIP), and has an Aliens

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Division for administering refugee, asylum, and immigration services. The Border Guards, established in 1998 to enforce border migration controls, and the Special Guards, established in 1999 to guard high-value government properties, are separate sub-forces within the HP.

15. (C) The HP employs a force of approximately 50,000 nationwide. Police officers receive equal pay to military officers of the same rank, and careers with the HP are considered low-paying but high on job security. Annual salaries start at around 8,500 euro (12,000 USD) and a police major with significant experience can earn 22,000 euro (30,000 USD) gross before perks and bonuses. Rank-and-file police officers typically come from poorer families, many from outside Athens, and there are widely believed rumors that many of these families use local political connections to land a police job. Applicants take qualification exams to obtain positions, but like the rest of the civil service political contacts are a variable for gaining positions. Almost all police have at least a high school degree, and a college degree or advanced police academy training are required for officer-rank policemen. Since 2000 all enlisted police must complete two years at the academy and officers must complete four years at the academy. Despite this, police are considered less well-educated than their counterparts in the National Intelligence Service and employees in other ministries. The HP reportedly has almost no officers from immigrant backgrounds, and the chief of one police union recently criticized the HP for refusing to "deal with the new reality," stating that accepting officers from migrant backgrounds would reduce racism and improve the HP' public image.

The HP Faces Public Disdain...Or Worse

16. (C) The police consistently rate near the bottom in polls of the most trusted institutions in Greece. They have certainly been the main target of the rioters over the past month. The anarchists and students repeatedly describe police as "pigs" and oppressors, despite the irony that many of these students come from more privileged backgrounds than typical police officers. Perhaps even more remarkable than the attacks on police stations and officers themselves -- which were not uncommon before December 6 though they tended to be on a smaller scale -- was the almost total absence of any public figures speaking in support of the police during the riots. Most Greeks do not share the demonstrators' view of police officers as the agents of a repressive capitalist system, but they do see police as ineffective, unprofessional, and unworthy of respect.

17. (C) This attitude has a variety of causes, some based on hearsay and some based on personal experience. Whatever the historical reality of the junta period, its mythology has captured the imagination of many Greeks, and it clearly places the police among the bad guys. As a result, there is a significant social stigma in Greece against "collaborating" with the police. Many Greeks have personal stories about police misconduct or incompetence, and the media frequently highlights such stories in sensational ways. The police did manage to improve their public image before and during the 2004 Olympics, through a public relations campaign and by virtue of the Olympics coming off without an embarrassing security incident. The HP's current leadership consists of officers who have spent nearly their entire careers after the PASOK police reforms of the 1980s, and if pressed most Greeks would likely concede that police officers today are more sophisticated than those of a few decades past.

18. (C) Nevertheless, the old attitudes die hard, and many of the reforms designed to "democratize" the police have made it more difficult for them to improve their reputation through performance. The increased politicization of the senior ranks, as well as the emergence of police unions, since 1981 is obvious, and it undermines both the legitimacy and continuity of professional police leadership. There are a number of onerous legal restrictions on the police, most famously the "asylum rule" that prohibits police interference on university campuses without the concurrence of elected university officials (or, in emergency situations, that of a public prosecutor) but ultimately permits anarchists to use campuses as safe havens for bomb-making and other criminal activities. Additionally, privacy laws hamper police from collecting basic information -- such as the identity of a cell phone subscriber. Prosecutors and judges tend to be suspicious of the police and to release those they arrest. (This is not true for all suspects - the justice system seems much stricter on immigrants than on native Greeks.)

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19. (C) Perhaps most importantly, police from the bottom to the top of the chain of command live in fear that if they make a wrong move they could lose their jobs or face criminal charges. Police officers are personally liable for their actions. During the December 2008 protests and riots, it appeared that Prime Minister Karamanlis calculated that it was better to let the rioters destroy businesses than to risk the political backlash from a stronger police response that risked casualties. They did not want to create another martyr. But every time a business is destroyed -- and every time a police officer is unwilling or unable to take action without specific authorization from superiors -- Greek citizens want it both ways: good policing and to be allowed to break laws of their choosing.

Ready to Cooperate, but Significant Weaknesses

110. (C) Embassy law enforcement officers assess that the HP is cooperating significantly in a variety of areas but has significant institutional and operational weaknesses. While the HP has a history of good cooperation with us on Embassy security issues and joint investigations, including the ongoing investigation of the January 2007 RPG attack on the Embassy by the Greek domestic terrorist group Revolutionary Struggle, its ability to act as an effective police andQQ"QQQQ QQ Q!Q\$"!Q d is constrained by the foQ\$ Q(QQQ \$ @Q !"@asic Training and EquiQ QQQ" ficer level, there is a large amount of training but trained people do not stay in place.

- Poor Case Management. HP principals tend to micromanage their operations and seldom delegate responsibilities to case agents. This creates a risk-averse working culture without any incentives for officers to take initiative. The HP lacks the ability to plan, develop, and manage long-term or complex cases in a disciplined way.

- Lack of Information Sharing / Stovepiping. A lack of coordination between HP units (or even within units), compounded by a top-down managerial approach, leads to inefficient and ineffective investigations. Poor information sharing tends to be a systemic problem within and between most Greek agencies in general.

- Politicized Assignments Process and Heavy Turnover. High-level officers are reshuffled every two to three years by the political party in power, wasting specialized training and destroying long-term case continuity and institutional knowledge.

- Poor Source Development. Except in a few specialized units most HP officers lack the experience and tools to develop credible, long-term sources -- whether in combating self-styled anarchists or tackling domestic terrorism -- which is compounded by the historical Greek stigma against "collaboration."

- Poor of Coordination with Prosecutors. The Greek justice system gives prosecutors and judges a high level of independence, but this structure results in a lack of cooperation between prosecuting attorneys and police investigators. Many prosecutors and even more judges are seen as more "liberal" on crime and will not follow up on police cases, thus reducing police motivation to investigate.

- Evidence Chain of Custody Problems. Some HP units lack

procedures to maintain a clear chain of custody for evidence, rendering the results of their investigations useless for U.S. law enforcement. Without a clear chain of custody, evidence is inadmissible in U.S. trials.

- Human Rights Issues. Though police officers are frequently unfairly attacked on brutality issues, NGOs legitimately claim that the HP ignores many human rights concerns. The HP's refugee and asylum offices are widely criticized for poor judgment and a lack of training and personnel, although it is also true that responsible HP sections are overwhelmed by the geometrically increasing problem of illegal immigration to Greece. HP officers lack training on handling domestic abuse and rape cases. Police corruption is an ongoing problem.

- Mission Disruption by Demonstration Detail. HP unit chiefs complain that their officers are frequently pulled for demonstration and riot duty -- regardless of whether they are

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Special Guards, narcotics, or anti-trafficking police. This mission disruption impacts ongoing investigations and is a drain on personnel resources.

Comment: U.S. Training a Critical Need

¶11. (C) For all the challenges faced by the police, there are reasons to be hopeful. Police officers with whom we have worked seem genuinely open to discreet cooperation and outside ideas, ranging from advice on what to do next in a specific case to formal training. Also, the HP did make a significant improvement in its professionalism and effectiveness during the run-up to the 2004 Olympics, in no small part due to U.S. assistance. Five years later, however, time and attrition have diminished the effectiveness of the pre-Olympic training. The recent rioting and the re-emergence of domestic terrorist groups, such as Revolut !QQQQ QQQQQ!QQQ QQQ at the security threats!QQQQ@Q%ograms such as International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) training and Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) programs.
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